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SUBJECT: HOW MUCH DO RUSSIAN DOCTORS REALLY MAKE?

REF: Moscow 1811

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**¶1.** (SBU) Summary: Although government doctors in Russia officially earn \$205-\$900 per month as a base salary, they frequently earn much more in reality. Physicians often supplement their base government salaries for clinical work with income from private patients, teaching positions in universities and medical schools, and extra payments from insurers and local and regional governments. Russian doctors are generally viewed as hard-working and enterprising, and they manage to make a decent living despite low official wages by wearing many hats and developing private practices. There are also numerous reports of unofficial extra payments to give certain patients preferential treatment at public facilities, but our contacts disagree about whether to call these bribes or simply "gratuities." End Summary.

Public Health Care Salaries

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**¶2.** (U) With the launch of the National Priority Health Project in 2006, the salaries of primary care medical professionals significantly improved, but official salaries are still low (reftel). The monthly salary for primary care doctors and pediatricians working in the public sector is now \$542-\$890 per month.

**¶3.** (SBU) With the National Priority Health Project raising base salaries in primary care, there has been a definite shift of some specialists and an influx of young doctors into primary care (reftel). The head of a health NGO that works with health clinics in various regions of Russia told us this is at least partly explained by the greater salaries that primary care doctors can now receive compared to those who work in a more specialized area. According to the NGO's informal polling at public health clinics, a doctor working at the HIV/AIDS center in Saint Petersburg can expect to earn \$271-\$310 a month as a base salary, and a doctor in an HIV/AIDS center in Saratov earns \$209 per month. The infectious disease specialist in a public health care clinic in Saint Petersburg can earn \$310-\$349 per month; while, the same specialist in Saratov earns \$122. These salaries pale in comparison to a general practitioner in primary care practicing in Saint Petersburg, who can earn more than \$969 per month at a public clinic; while a primary care physician in Saratov can earn more than \$581 per month.

**¶4.** (SBU) Medical salaries vary widely by region and are significantly lower outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg. In 2005

in the city of Angarsk, the average salary of all health care workers was \$240 per month, and physicians earned about \$360 per month. In 2006, medical salaries in Angarsk increased to an overall average of \$446 per month, while doctors' salaries increased to \$760. In Yakutia (Siberia), a doctor can expect to earn about \$300 a month. (NOTE: A good pair of winter boots in Yakutia can cost almost \$400. END NOTE)

¶ 15. (SBU) According to one consultant at a health NGO, an average physician in Moscow can expect to earn \$200-\$1000 per month in official income. Primary care doctors in Moscow's public medical clinics make more, about \$1,000-\$1,350 per month. However, given the high cost of living in Moscow today, many Moscow physicians must juggle multiple jobs to make a livable wage, and some resort to unofficial means to enhance their base salaries.

#### Base Salaries Are Just the Tip of the Iceberg

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¶ 16. (SBU) The base salaries of doctors are enhanced in a number of ways. Insurers and local and regional governments frequently provide payments to clinics and hospitals, which in turn are distributed to doctors in the form of monthly bonuses which supplement their base incomes. Doctors also receive bonuses for outstanding service and for occupying more than one position within a given health care institution or at other clinics. According to a senior Moscow cardiologist, the base salary only makes up about 18 percent of a heart specialist's total compensation. Payments from public and private insurers and from the Moscow city government make up about 64 percent of income. An experienced cardiologist in his hospital makes about \$791 per month in official salary, including extra payments from insurers and the government, while a department head makes about \$1,542 per month. The highest paid specialties in Russia are dentists, anesthesiologists, radiologists, intensive care doctors, and infectious disease specialists, according to the senior cardiologist. (NOTE: Infectious disease specialists have always received higher pay to compensate for the extra risks associated

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with their job. An infectious disease physician's monthly salary at a clinic includes an additional 15 percent for the risks of treating acutely infectious patients. A doctor at an HIV/AIDS center receives an additional 60 percent for infection risks. Even so, the number of infectious disease doctors is decreasing. END NOTE.)

¶ 17. (SBU) On top of official salaries, doctors routinely maintain private practices at public facilities and schedule private clients in between their public patients in order to utilize state-owned equipment, though this practice is technically illegal. Many specialists are able to cultivate an active clientele of patients who need long-term care or periodic monitoring of chronic conditions. These patients will pay the doctor directly for consultations and visits, and will pay the hospital and clinic for tests, just as in the United States. A doctor at a health NGO told us dentists, neurosurgeons, and obstetricians and gynecologists are among the highest-paid specialties and have plenty of opportunity to develop lucrative private practices on the side.

¶ 18. (SBU) Russian doctors also sometimes receive monetary benefits from pharmaceutical companies for prescribing certain drugs, though these payments make up a fairly small share of doctors' overall income, according to our contacts. One doctor told us that Indian drug companies are well-known for paying the most to doctors for prescribing certain drugs.

¶ 19. (SBU) Many doctors find ways to supplement their salaries through entirely legal channels. Many physicians maintain multiple positions within the health care sector. For example, a doctor might work in a clinic during the day and teach night classes at a university.

#### Private Health Care Salaries Much Higher

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¶ 10. (SBU) Private health care in Russia has become increasingly popular, especially in Moscow, because of rising incomes and a lack

of patience with the public health care system. A Moscow private diagnostic laboratory told us their physician salaries are in the range of \$1,000-\$2,000 per month. A private Russian-Swiss company quoted salaries for medical advisors at \$3,500 per month. According to one contact, a Dentist at the European Medical Center in Moscow can expect to earn \$3,000 per month, a general practitioner would earn \$4,000-\$5,000 per month, and a plastic surgeon would earn \$5,000-\$7,000 per month.

Bribes, Tips, Cognac and Chocolates

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¶11. (SBU) Our contacts disagree about whether to characterize extra payments to doctors to receive better medical services through the state system as a bribe or simply as a "gratuity." As one doctor contended, small gifts to doctors are traditional in the Russian culture. Due to the close relationships which grow over time between doctors and patients, many patients feel it necessary to present their doctor with "gifts of gratitude," as one doctor told us, especially for obstetricians and gynecologists, dentists, and surgeons. It is understood that by bringing gifts or making extra monetary payments, patients can expect better care in the future. As one doctor explained, "Someone willing to pay extra is a more attractive client."

¶12. (SBU) According to one recent study conducted by the Russian branch of Transparency International, a patient can expect to pay an extra \$90 a day in bribes or "tips" for medical care in Moscow. Contacts tell us that it is common to pay relatively small amounts of extra cash (\$40-\$100) both in clinics and in hospitals, but patients normally don't receive anything more than normal treatment and care in exchange for these unofficial payments.

¶13. (U) According to a survey in June by the Levada polling center, the Ministry of Health and Social Development was considered by 19 percent of respondents to be the most corrupt, the highest response rate of any Russian ministry. (NOTE: The Ministry of Internal Affairs was the next highest with 15 percent of respondents considering it the most corrupt). Of those surveyed, 51 percent acknowledged paying bribes for medical care. Georgiy Satarov, the head of the anti-corruption NGO INDEM Foundation, claimed at a corruption conference in April that as many as 20 million Russians do not seek medical care, because they can no longer afford the routine extra payments needed to obtain medical services. Problems with health care were also identified as one of the chief sources of complaints from citizens in the annual report released at the beginning of April by Vladimir Lukin, Russia's Human Rights

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Ombudsman.

¶14. (SBU) Russia's doctors and nurses have long been underpaid based on their official salaries, and there is a long history of making informal extra payments to doctors. One doctor told us a well-known anecdote about one of the Stalinist era Soviet Commissars, who said that doctors and teachers do not need a salary, "because the people will feed them." During the Soviet era, a barter system of bribes was used in villages and medium-sized towns. The butcher, for example, would ensure the doctor received the choicest cuts of meat, and the doctor would make sure the butcher and his family didn't have to wait in line when they went to the local clinic or hospital.

In larger cities, it was not uncommon for patients to bring a box of chocolates or bottle of cognac to the clinic as a gift for the doctor. Today's Russia appears to be maintaining these traditions of privilege.

BURNS